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THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER.

by

N.Martin Curtis

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THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER

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THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER

BY Newton
BREVET MAJOR GENERAL N. MARTIN CURTIS, U.S.V.

General Grant, in the 19th Chapter of the 2d Volume of his Personal Memoirs, refers to Fort Fisher in the following words:

"Up to January, 1865, the enemy occupied Fort Fisher, at the mouth of Cape Fear River and below the City of Wilmington. This port was of immense importance to the Confederates, because it formed their principal inlet for blockade-runners, by means of which they brought in from abroad such supplies and munitions of war as they could not procure at home. It was equally important to us to get possession of it, not only because it was desirable to cut off their supplies so as to ensure a speedy termination of the war, but also because foreign governments, particularly the British government, were constantly threatening that unless ours could maintain the blockade off that coast they should cease to recognize any blockade. For these reasons I determined, with the concurrence of the Navy Department, in December, to send an expedition against Fort Fisher for the purpose of capturing it."

Thomas E. Taylor, an English merchant, one of the most active and successful blockade-runners during the war, says in his book, "Running the Blockade," page 139:

"That morning (in Richmond, Va., December, 1864) I had an appointment with the Commissary General, who divulged to me under promise of secrecy that Lee's army was in terrible straits, and had in fact rations for only thirty days. He asked me if I could help him. I said I would do my best, and after some negotiations he undertook to pay me a profit of 350 per cent upon any provisions and meat I could bring in within the next three weeks. . . . Although it was a hard trip it paid well, as we had on board coming out a most magnificent cargo, a great deal of sea island cotton, the profits upon which and the provisions I had taken in amounted to over eighty-five thousand pounds — not bad work for about twenty days."

January 15th, 1865, the day of the capture of Fort Fisher, he wrote from Nassau to his chiefs in Liverpool, England: (p. 136, same vol.):

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"Altogether I think the Confederate government is going to the *bad*, and if they don't take care the Confederacy will go too. I never saw things look so gloomy, and I think spring will finish them unless they make a change for the better. Georgia is gone, and they say Sherman is going to seize Branchville; if he does Charleston and Wilmington will be done — and if Wilmington goes Lee has to evacuate Richmond and retire into Tennessee. He told me the other day that if they did not keep Wilmington they could not save Richmond. They nearly had Fort Fisher — they were within sixty yards of it — and had they pushed on as they ought to have done could have taken it. It was a terrific bombardment; they estimate that about 40,000 shells were sent into it. Colonel Lamb behaved like a brick — splendidly. I got the last of the Whitworths in, and they are now at the fort. They are very hard up for food in the field, but the *Banshee* has this time 600 barrels of pork and 1500 boxes of meat — enough to feed Lee's army for a month."

When Colonel Lamb took command of the fort, July 4th, 1862, he found it a quadrilateral work with six guns, flanked north and south by five detached batteries carrying eleven guns, four of which were casemated. Only one of the seventeen guns was of modern ordnance. He stated that the frigate *Minnesota* could have destroyed the works and driven them out in a few hours. During his occupation of the fort he made it the largest and best equipped fortification constructed by the Confederates, as shown in his description of it as it stood before the attack.

At the land-face of Fort Fisher, five miles from the intrenched camp at Sugar Loaf, the peninsula was about half a mile wide. This face commenced about a hundred feet from the river with a half bastion, and extended with a heavy curtain to a full bastion on the ocean side, where it joined the sea-face, without moat, scarp and counterscarp. The outer slope was twenty feet high from the berm to the top of the parapet, at an angle of 45°, and was sodded with marsh grass, which grew luxuriantly. The parapet was not less than twenty-five feet thick, with an inclination of only one foot. The revetment was five feet nine inches high from the floor of the gun-chambers, and these were some twelve feet or more from the interior plane. The guns were all mounted in barbette, on Columbiad carriages; there was not a single casemated gun in the fort.

Between the gun-chambers, containing one or two guns each (there were twenty heavy guns on the land-face) there were heavy traverses, exceeding in size any known to engineers, to protect from an enfilading fire. They extended out some twelve feet on the parapet and were twelve feet or more in height above the parapet running back thirty feet or more. The gun-chambers were reached from the rear by steps. In each traverse was an alternate magazine or bomb-proof, the latter ventilated by an air-chamber. Passageways penetrated the traverses in the interior of the work, forming additional bomb-proofs for the reliefs for the guns.

The sea-face for a hundred yards from the northeast bastion was of the same massive character as the land-face. A crescent battery intended for four guns adjoined this. A series of batteries extended for three-quarters of a mile along the sea, connected by an infantry curtain. These batteries had heavy traverses ten or twelve feet high above the top of the parapets. On this line was a bomb-proof electric battery connected with a system of submarine torpedoes. Farther along a mound battery sixty feet high was erected, with two heavy guns, which had a plunging fire on the channel; this was connected with the battery north of it by a light curtain. Following the line of the works it was one mile from the angle of the sea and land faces to the mound, and upon this line twenty-four heavy guns were mounted. From the mound for nearly a mile to the end of the point was a level sand plain scarcely three feet above high tide, and much of it was submerged during gales. At this point was Battery Buchanan, of four guns, in the shape of an ellipse, commanding the inlet, its two 11-inch guns covering the approach by land. An advanced redoubt with a 24-pounder was added after the first expedition. A wharf for large steamers was in close proximity to these works. As a defence against infantry there was a system of subterra torpedoes extending across the peninsula, five to six hundred feet from the land-face, and so disconnected that the explosion of one would not affect the others; inside the torpedoes,

about fifty feet from the berm of the work, extending from river bank to sea-shore, was a heavy palisade of sharpened logs nine feet high, pierced for musketry. There was a redoubt guarding the sally-port, from which two Napoleons were run out, as occasion required. At the river end of the palisade was a deep and muddy slough, across which was a bridge, over which the river road entered the fort. Commanding this bridge was a Napoleon gun. There were three mortars in rear of the land-face.

Colonel Lamb says:

"Fort Fisher commanded the last gateway between the Confederate States and the outside world. Its capture with the resulting loss of all the Cape Fear River defences, and of Wilmington, the great importing depot of the South, effectually ended all blockade running. Lee sent me word that Fort Fisher must be held or he could not subsist his army."

General Butler reported at 8 P.M., December 27th, to General Grant, his return to Fortress Monroe, briefly stating the operations of the men under his command, and his reasons for withdrawing his forces. He stated that all but about three hundred were re-embarked before he left the North Carolina coast, and that he had no doubt they were all safely off by that time. He also said that he would go up to see General Grant the next morning.

The transports returning with the troops (excepting one on which was about one-quarter of Curtis's brigade, which did not return until after the second expedition sailed) passed the capes and anchored in Hampton Roads early in the morning of December 29th, and returned to their camps near the New Market Road on the 30th of December.

In the interval between the return of the first expedition and the departure of the second, General Grant was in correspondence with the President, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy and Admiral Porter, in reference to the failure of the first expedition, and the preparation going forward to renew the attack upon Fort Fisher.

On January 2nd General Grant requested General Butler to send Major General Terry to him at City Point, and the same

day issued Special Orders No. 2, Headquarters Armies of the United States, directing eight thousand infantry, two batteries of artillery without horses, with four days' cooked rations in haversacks, to be got in immediate readiness to embark on transports, with orders to report to Major General W. T. Sherman, at Savannah, Ga.; that the troops and artillery of the late expedition against Wilmington, being experienced in embarking and debarking, should be selected, and to make up the balance of the eight thousand, good and tried soldiers of the Second Brigade, First Division, Twenty-fourth Army Corps, should be taken. Brevet Major General A. H. Terry, U. S. Vols., was assigned to the command of these forces, and directed that every practicable precaution should be observed to prevent information of any movement of troops getting to the enemy.

On January 2nd General Grant gave General Terry written instructions to renew the attack on Fort Fisher, with details for his co-operation with Admiral Porter.

On January 4th Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Comstock, Aide-de-camp, was directed to report to General Terry, and accompany him as chief engineer of the expedition under his command.

January 4th, on receipt of a letter from Admiral Porter, General Grant gave General Terry additional instructions governing his action after joining Admiral Porter's fleet. When the troops went down the James River, General Grant accompanied General Terry to Fortress Monroe, and gave such verbal instructions as he deemed necessary.

January 4th, 1865, five days after returning from the first expedition, the First Brigade broke camp, marched in a heavy snow-storm to Bermuda Landing, and bivouacked for the night.

The next morning, General Adelbert Ames, commanding Second Division, Twenty-fourth Army Corps, directed me to embark my brigade on two river steamers, proceed to Hampton Roads, transfer my command to the steamship *Atlantic* and to reserve rooms on board the ship for himself and staff; and he especially directed that neither myself nor any member of

my command should leave the ship after boarding it. The trip down the James River, and the transfer of the troops to the *Atlantic* were made before sundown. Before dark all the division officers, except General Ames and his aide, Captain Henry C. Lockwood, came on board, and reported that General Ames and Captain Lockwood would soon join us. Two rooms had been reserved for General Ames, and one for each of his staff.

About nine o'clock in the evening information reached us that Ames's division, Twenty-fourth Army Corps, Paine's division, Twenty-fifth Corps (Colored), J. C. Abbott's Second Brigade, First Division, Twenty-fourth Army Corps, and two batteries of artillery were on transports in Hampton Roads.

At five minutes after twelve o'clock that night Captain Algernon E. Smith, 117th New York, aide to General A. H. Terry, brought to my state-room a sealed envelope addressed "To the Senior Officer on Board the *Atlantic*," and asked me to take and receipt for it. This I declined to do, informing him that General Ames was the senior officer on board, and the proper person to receive it. He left, but soon returned with one of the division staff, who reported that General Ames was not at that time on board. I then receipted for the despatch, and after reading it to the division staff officer, requested him to acquaint General Ames with its contents as soon as he could do so. The orders addressed "To the Senior Officer on Board the *Atlantic*" and the sealed orders addressed "To be opened off Cape Henry," read as follows :

HEADQUARTERS EXPEDITIONARY FORCES,
January 5, 1865.

GENERAL ORDERS, No. 2.

The vessels containing the troops of this expedition will leave Hampton Roads precisely at 4 A.M. to-morrow. As far as possible the vessels containing the troops of each division will keep together, and the whole fleet will follow the flagship, which will carry red, white, and green lights at the masthead. They will pass out between the capes, and when off Cape Henry the sealed orders which are furnished to the commanding officer on each transport will be opened. The speed of the transports will be as nearly as possible eight knots per hour.

By order of Bvt. Maj. Gen. A. H. TERRY:
A. TERRY, Captain, and Assistant Adjutant General."

HEADQUARTERS EXPEDITIONARY FORCES,
January 5, 1865.

SEALED ORDERS,

COMMANDING OFFICER OF TROOPS,
On Board of U. S. Transport Atlantic:

SIR:

The transport fleet will rendezvous twenty-five miles off Beaufort, N.C. You will immediately proceed to that point and report to the senior officer of the expedition present at the time of your arrival.

You will then await further orders.

By order of Bvt. Maj. Gen. A. H. TERRY:
A. TERRY, Captain, and Assistant Adjutant General.

I sent word to Captain Gray, commanding the ship to weigh anchor and be ready to sail at four o'clock in the morning. I went on deck at 3 A.M., and found the men weighing anchor; but the ship waited for its position in the line until after daylight, and then passed out between the capes. While sailing out breakfast was served to the officers in the cabin. Before taking seats at the table I requested Captain Charles A. Carleton, acting assistant adjutant general on division staff, to invite General Ames to join us. He replied, "General Ames did not come on board until late, and will not breakfast for several hours." Before the officers left the table Captain Gray was called on deck. He soon returned and reported that the ship was off Cape Henry, and asked for further orders. I handed to Captain Carleton the sailing orders, as well as the sealed orders, "To be opened when off Cape Henry," and requested him to give them to General Ames. At first Captain Carleton declined to do so, saying he did not wish to disturb General Ames, and said that I should open the envelope and attend to all matters of detail while on shipboard, as Colonel Bell had done on the first expedition. I replied that I should not assume any of the duties of the division commander until directed by him to do so, and that if he declined to take the orders to General Ames I would send one of my own staff. Thereupon Captain Carleton took the orders to the state-room in which General Ames's baggage had been placed, but soon returned to the cabin and reported that General Ames was not on board the ship.

During the second day after the arrival of the division at the rendezvous off Beaufort, N. C., General Ames and his personal aide, Captain Lockwood, came on board the *Atlantic* from a hospital ship which had sailed from Fortress Monroe the day following the departure of the expedition. General Ames then charged General Curtis with "sailing with his division for the purpose of commanding it," and used offensive words, which were promptly resented and their retraction demanded. Following this unhappy and uncalled for incident the intercourse between these officers was limited to the strictest requirements of official duty.

After the sailing of the troops above mentioned, Brevet Brigadier General H. L. Abbott sailed from Fortress Monroe, on the 7th of January, with a siege train of twenty 30-pounder and four 100-pounder Parrott guns, twenty Coehorn mortars, three companies of the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, and two companies of the 15th New York Engineers. This additional force joined us at the rendezvous one day before the landing.

Early on the morning of Friday, January 13th, the vessels of Admiral Porter's squadron moved into position before Fort Fisher and opened a vigorous bombardment of the fort, which continued without cessation until its capture. About eight o'clock A.M. a division of light draught naval vessels was detached from the squadron to cover the landing of the troops, which was completed at three o'clock in the afternoon, together with extra rations, ammunition and intrenching tools. The landing was made through a heavy surf in which officers, men, provisions in haversacks, and ammunition in boxes were thoroughly soaked.

A line established across the peninsula in the early morning was soon abandoned for a second line, a mile farther south, on which breastworks extending from the beach to the Cape Fear River were thrown up during the night and completed at eight o'clock the next morning, when the troops of General Ames's division were withdrawn from the line. General Paine's divis-

ion and Abbott's brigade (under command of General Paine) were left to defend it if attacked by the enemy, then in large force at Sugar Loaf, two and a half miles north. The maintaining of this line was of vital importance — a failure to do so would have caused the withdrawal of troops from before the fort, to reinforce the line. General Terry was justified, in view of the past services of the troops under Generals Paine and Abbott, in leaving it in their charge. The regiments of Abbott's brigade were first organized under General Terry, and he always fondly referred to it as "his old brigade." They were prepared to make a stubborn defence, but the mildness of General Bragg's demonstrations did not rise to the dignity of an attack at any time. Not only did he not, throughout the day, force back the line; his fire did not wound a single Union soldier.

For the third time since he rejoined the expedition, General Ames now requested General Terry to promise that he would not designate General Curtis for any special duty, and, failing to obtain assurance that his request would be complied with, stated to General Terry that he would not be responsible for the success of any movement with which General Curtis was charged. Thereupon General Terry answered: "I have known General Curtis for nearly two years, and have perfect confidence in his ability and fidelity. I will relieve him from your command, and direct him to report to me for orders." Immediately after this General Terry informed me that from that time I should receive all orders from him direct. A brief statement of this incident is made to give a better understanding of subsequent events.

Soon after being relieved from General Ames's command my brigade accompanied General Terry and Colonel Comstock, Aide to General Grant, to Battery Holland, below Craig's Landing, where a small steamer, loaded with forage and ammunition, was captured. While marching down a shell from the rebel gunboat *Chickamauga*, lying in the Cape Fear River, ex-

ploded near the head of the column, seriously wounding Captain J. H. Reeve, commanding the 3rd New York, and three men of the brigade.

A skirmish line was sent forward from Battery Holland, under cover of which General Terry, Colonel Comstock and myself went along the sand dunes near the river to within six hundred yards of the fort. After completing his observations General Terry asked, "Do you think the fort can be successfully assaulted with the force I can spare from the line established last night, the holding of which is of the first importance?" I replied that I believed the three brigades already withdrawn from the line could carry the fort by an assault if the dispositions were properly made, and if the Navy should support the troops from start to finish. He said, "It has been definitely determined that in case an assault is made you will make it. I will see Admiral Porter this evening, and we will then decide what course to pursue."

General Terry directed me to remain near the fort if I could do so safely, or to retire to the reserves near the breastworks thrown up the night before, where he could be found to receive reports of any incidents which I might think it important for him to know. He then returned, with Colonel Comstock, to the reserves.

From a sand dune on the right of my skirmish line I took a survey of the ground in front of the parapet, and determined to throw up breastworks to protect the assaulting party. On account of the conformation I decided to construct these lines at an angle to the curtain, the left flanks to be fifty yards nearer the fort than the right flanks. There was marshy ground in front of the west half of the parapet, but I preferred to march through it rather than go to the eastward over dry ground, although the west end of the parapet was higher than the east end, as the low ground in front made it easier to get under the plane of fire than at the east end, where the surface was higher, and served as a natural glacis. Because of this, when the

assault finally came to be made, the naval column was kept under fire longer than were the troops assaulting on the left end of the parapet.

As soon as it was dark a skirmish line was deployed at five paces, the front rank carrying muskets, the rear shovels, and advanced to the place selected for the first line. Here the men in the rear line proceeded to throw up enough sand to protect a man lying on his face, while the line with muskets advanced twenty paces beyond the men with shovels. In the drift sand the work was quickly done. Then the man with the shovel went forward and gave it to the picket, from whom he took his musket and marched forward twenty paces, while the former picket threw up the sand where he stood; and so the lines went forward, each man exchanging gun for shovel. In this manner four lines of breastworks were laid out, the last being under the plane of fire. Details were made to connect these "Gopher Holes," as the men called them, thus making continuous lines. About one hundred and seventy-five yards from the parapet a higher and heavier breastwork was thrown up to protect a party of sharpshooters; and forty men, selected on account of their skill as marksmen, were immediately sent to occupy it. They had orders to remain until the next night, or until an assault should be made, in which case they were instructed to join the first line and go to the fort. In the meantime they were to prevent the loading of the Columbiads on the parapet. The work was completed before dawn, and the tired troops of the First Brigade turned in for a well-earned rest. Many of those who slept on the sands of Federal Point the night preceding the battle of January 15th, friends and foes alike, will, from causes incident to the service, remember that night, with all its disagreeable features, as one which afforded them sweeter and more restful slumber than they have since obtained on the softest couch.

On the morning of the 15th General Terry, with Colonel Comstock, came to Battery Holland, and informed me that it

had been agreed between Admiral Porter and himself that the three brigades of the Second Division should attack the west end of the parapet, while sixteen hundred sailors and four hundred marines would attack the east end at three o'clock in the afternoon. He then asked, "What have you done or discovered during the night?" He was told about the rifle pits and their use when advancing on the fort, and the stationing of men under the plane of fire to keep the cannoneers from loading the Columbiads when the assaulting forces should take position preliminary to the final rush. He approved the work, and later sent forward sixty men of the 13th Indiana (Third Brigade) with repeating rifles, to join the sharpshooters. They went under command of Lieutenant Colonel Samuel M. Zent, and they performed most valuable service.

General Terry said to me, "You stated yesterday that an assault would be successful 'if the dispositions were properly made.' Your brigade is to lead, and I should like to know your views as to the formation." I replied that I wished to charge in line, brigade front, make successive advances from one rifle pit to the next, the final rush not to be made until we were as near the fort as we could get without drawing the infantry fire, and that our movements in this particular would be governed by the action of the enemy in coming to the parapet; that when his infantry came up we would wait behind our newly made rifle pits until the Navy pounded them down; when they were down we would go forward to the next line; when they came to the parapet again we would again lie down until they were driven back; and when they should refuse to leave the parapet we would make the final rush and get under the plane of fire before the enemy could deliver a second volley.

General Terry said, "Don't you want to strike them in column with a hammer-head?" I replied, "After I get under the plane of fire I will; but before that the thinner the line the better. The troops will be in column when they get to the parapet. The right regiment will go straight to the right of the

left salient, the three other regiments will oblique to the right and strike the fort at the same place, and so reduce the front to one-third of what it will be at the start. We will pass the stockade and mount the parapet, and if we cannot get in, send a brigade to push us in." The subject was fully discussed, and after Colonel Comstock had given the plan his approval General Terry accepted it. He thus became responsible for the plan, and ordered its execution.

I said, "General Terry, the final rush will be made when you see me rise in the middle of the line and hear me call aloud. Soon after you will see the First Brigade go through the stockade and up the parapet ; then send Pennypacker's brigade." He replied, "With the men of your brigade on the parapet I shall feel certain of success. A lodgment there assures victory."

About noon General Ames came to the front with Bell's and Pennypacker's brigades, and halted them in rear of my brigade.

A little time before advancing to the line from which the start was to be made, a naval officer, Lieutenant Porter, I think, came to me and said, "General Terry informs me that your brigade is to lead in the assault, and I desire to be informed of your plans, so that the sailors and marines on the beach may move at the same time you do." I told him of the plans for a gradual approach, and that the final rush would be made when the garrison remained on the parapet, at which time the column on the beach should also start ; that I did not approve of the formation the Navy seemed inclined to make, and feared the result would not be satisfactory. He replied, "I am sorry Army officers find so much fault with the Navy. We are trying to help them on their own ground, and they ought to be satisfied." I answered, "You misunderstand me. We want you very much, both your guns on the ships and your men on the shore. I speak as a landsman about operations on land — I would not criticise nautical matters. Your men are too compactly formed — your front is too narrow for the depth of your

column. To go into action as your men are now formed places you under a great disadvantage. You should hold back your main body until your advanced line gets a foothold on the fort. If you go forward as you are you will be fearfully punished, and the only good your column will do us will be to receive the fire which otherwise would come to our lines. I fully understand the great advantage the troops will derive from this movement of the Navy, but hesitate to commend it when I think of the heavy loss they must sustain in making it in the formation you have adopted." The officer left, assuring me that the Navy would do its part and merit approval whether the Army gave it or not.

Two thousand men from the Navy, from sixty ships, unacquainted one with another or with the service they were to undertake, were brought together on the beach to perform a most hazardous work. The number of officers was small — entirely too few for the number of men engaged. As before stated, the force was too compact. The first line should have been longer and thinner, and the main body kept out of the fire until the first line had reached the fort. Such a plan requires good men — veterans; it is, however, the way to assault fortifications with the least loss of life, almost the only plan by which to achieve success.

Before advancing to the first line every officer and man had been instructed as to his movements and the order in which they would take place, and that the point of attack would be between the first and second traverses.

Just before the preliminary movements were begun Captain A. G. Lawrence, of General Ames's staff, came to me and asked if he could go with my brigade. I replied that he could if he would not interfere with its movements, and sent him to Lieutenant Colonel F. X. Meyer, commanding the 117th New York, at the right of the line. Captain Lawrence understood that I was not under the command of his chief, and that he could not accompany my brigade without my permission. He did not go

as the representative of another, nor did he make the slightest attempt to direct the movements of the men. He fell at the stockade, seriously wounded, the victim of a valor which he conspicuously exhibited in every battle in which he participated.

The preliminary advances were made in a succession of thin lines, number one of the first line going forward to a rifle pit, followed by number two; the rear rank advancing in the same manner. By this method only one-fourth of the line was exposed to the enemy's fire.

After the first advance Captain Keeler, of the division staff, who was near the right of my line, called out, "General Ames says the time for the assault has come." I replied, "I shall obey the orders of General Terry, who understands that the advance depends upon the fire of the Navy and its effect upon the garrison."

Three short advances were made. During each the garrison came to the parapet; when the line halted it returned to the bomb-proofs, each time remaining longer on the parapet and suffering greater damage from the naval fire. When the enemy seemed determined to remain on the parapet the final rush was made. I arose from the middle of the line and called out "Forward," advancing as I arose from the ground. Each officer and man had been instructed to advance as he got up, and to go forward in silence. Cheering was positively forbidden, the object being to keep the men from expending their wind needlessly, as it was all important to save it for the final rush up the parapet. We were fifteen paces to the front before we reached the usual height of a running man, which is about one-third less than the height when standing. The result of this movement was to cause the first volley to pass over our heads, doing but little damage. Had the order been given, "Attention, first battalion, guide right, second, third and fourth battalions oblique to the right," many in the line would have been shot down before a start was made.

The naval fire had made many openings in the stockade, but

not enough to allow speedy passage through it. One hundred axes which had been distributed in the brigade were vigorously used, under a galling fire, in making openings for the men. The first forty or fifty through the stockade climbed up the parapet and met the enemy between the first and second traverses. In this space there were two Columbiads, one disabled, the enemy loading the other. The charge had been sent home, but the ramrod not withdrawn, when we overpowered the gunners. The man at the breech put out his hand with a primer to discharge the piece, after his surrender had been demanded. A sharp blow from a sabre on his outstretched hand quickly dissuaded him, and the charge remained until the captors had leisure to withdraw it.

The first battle-flag to come up was a marker of the 117th New York, which was promptly placed on the second traverse. Its right to remain there was tested in a hand to hand contest with swords and bayonets, in which the Yankees won.

We then went down to the floor of the fort and secured the men serving a Napoleon gun at the gate, and a number of infantry posted at the stockade west of the gate. These men were sent to the rear without escort. Their capture removed the chief obstacle to an approach by the road. At this time the Second Brigade entered the fort, some through the gate, and others over the parapet. Just before returning to the parapet I saw General Ames advancing from the gate, through which he had apparently entered the fort. He requested Adjutant Roys, 117th New York, to take a number of prisoners then coming out of the left bomb-proof, to General Terry, with his compliments. I directed Adjutant Roys to return to the parapet, where he could be better employed than in escorting prisoners to the rear. He obeyed my order, and rendered most efficient service in the front line throughout the day. Upon reaching the parapet I found that a large number of my brigade had succeeded in getting through the stockade, and were advancing to the place first gotten possession of, where they were being rapidly joined by men of the Second Brigade.

At the time we made the grand rush for the left of the parapet, the naval column moved in mass upon the sea bastion. The enemy, believing this to be the main attack, turned upon them all the guns which could sweep the beach, and massed more than half of his infantry behind the right of the parapet to repel the attack. Colonel Lamb conducted this defence of the sea bastion in person. The enemy's fire upon the naval column was terribly effective, spreading death and disorder. Except a few, who reached the stockade, those not disabled soon retired.

General Whiting at this time occupied a position on the parapet midway between the sea bastion and the sally-port. The repulse of the naval column caused the troops under Colonel Lamb and General Whiting to cheer vigorously, the cheers being heard above the roar of the cannon; but their exultation was short, for, upon looking to the west, they saw two U. S. flags on the left of the parapet, — their comrades unable to remove them. General Whiting hurried with the troops near him to the left of the line, and joined in the contest which we made for the third traverse. While in this hand to hand conflict he received a mortal wound, and was carried to a bomb-proof, whence he encouraged his men to continue the defence. Colonel Pennypacker, commanding the Second Brigade, was severely wounded while placing the colors of his regiment on this traverse, and Colonel Moore, 203rd Pennsylvania, was killed while advancing with the colors of his regiment to the same position. Lieut. Colonel Burney and Major Jones, 142nd New York, were wounded here, but soon after re-entered the contest. Here Captain Thomas, 117th New York, was killed. Lieut. Colonel Meyer and Major Bagg, 117th New York, although each wounded, and many officers of the Second Brigade whose names I cannot give, came to the front and joined in the contest until our possession of the traverse was undisputed. Our killed and wounded on the parapet impeded our advance to the fourth traverse so that we were scarcely able to go forward

without treading upon them. Colonel Lamb came forward with troops to meet us at the fourth traverse, bringing into action a larger number than we had met at the third. Our numbers were also increased by those who joined us as rapidly as they came into the fort. The struggle for this traverse was the hottest and most prolonged single contest of the day. The loss of life was great on both sides. The killed and wounded were set aside to make room for comrades who came impetuously forward to support their respective sides. In this contest Colonel Lamb was seriously wounded, and taken to the same bomb-proof occupied by General Whiting, from which place he directed his subordinates to make every resistance to our advance; but our success in this fearful struggle had turned the tide, their defence became less spirited and effective, and each succeeding traverse was taken with less difficulty.

The naval fire throughout the day had been delivered with singular accuracy, at the rate of two or three shells per second, in front of the assaulting forces; but at the fifth traverse a shot went wide of its mark and killed or disabled all but four men in our front line. Fearing that a slackening of our fire would invite a countercharge, I myself discharged the guns of the killed and disabled men until reinforcements were brought forward. A sudden emergency compelled this action. It was not done to encourage the soldiers — no theatrical efforts were needed to quicken their zeal. Men unable to stand and fire their pieces handed up the guns of their dead and helpless comrades, and when given back reloaded them again and again, exhibiting a frenzied zeal and unselfish devotion, that, seemingly, nothing but death could chill.

While we were capturing the traverses, others on the floor of the fort fought the enemy in bomb-proofs and behind obstructions near the parapet, keeping pace with us. Lieut. Colonel Lyman, 203rd Pennsylvania, was killed while actively urging this line forward. Several company officers were in this detachment, and vigorously conducted these operations after his death, among

them Captain William H. Walling, 142nd New York Volunteers, who, on the first expedition, had captured the garrison flag of Fort Fisher. Captain R. D. Morehouse, 142nd New York Volunteers, in charge of a party, captured a large number of Confederates in the sally-port, from which they had energetically opposed the advance of our forces on the floor of the fort; but our progress on the parapet rendered their position untenable, and, by a skilful movement, he captured them before they could retire to other defences. His skill and bravery were as conspicuous then as his modest dignity is noticeable among his companions of the Legion. This capture was considered by the Confederates a dishonorable surrender. They did not know then that these men had been compelled to surrender, and had only put up a white flag when retreat was impossible. Major William J. Sanders reports this incident in the following language: "General Whiting, although wounded, was still directing, as far as possible, the movements of his small force, when Major Riley rushed in and reported the astonishing fact that an officer, having put his handkerchief on a ramrod whilst he was temporarily in another portion of his command, had surrendered three hundred of his men and admitted a regiment into the galleries of the sally-port on the land-face."

Progress was more easily and steadily made until we gained possession of the seventh traverse at 4.45 P.M., where it was found that our best marksmen could drive the gunners from the Columbiad on the sea bastion, with which gun the enemy had enfiladed the ditch and given the assailants more trouble than with any other piece in the fort. When it was discovered that this gun could be silenced, the project of marching up the ditch and capturing the sea bastion was decided upon, and men at the west end of the fort were summoned to undertake it. I sent Corporal Jones, of the color guard of the 117th New York, to the west end of the fort to bring men forward. He came back, and stated that General Ames directed him to return and say that men could not be sent, but spades to fortify would be

furnished. My orderly, A. D. Knight, was next sent to obtain men, and directed to state the object of the movement to be made. He soon returned, and stated that General Ames had ordered him to say that the men were exhausted, and no further advance would be attempted until reinforcements arrived in the morning; that we should hold the ground occupied, if possible, and that intrenching tools would be sent to us. I directed Orderly Knight to go back and request officers under my rank to collect men and bring them forward, so that the attack could be made before dark; to say that the resistance of the enemy was less than at the beginning of the battle, and that the capture of the bastion would compel an early surrender. Knight soon returned with an armful of spades which General Ames had ordered him to carry to me that I might fortify and hold our position until fresh troops came into the fort. I threw the spades over the traverse to the Confederates. Being convinced that General Ames intended to suspend operations until reinforcements came in, I directed Silas W. Kempton, Mate U. S. Navy, who reported to me early in the engagement and volunteered to serve in whatever capacity he might be useful, to go, for the second time, to General Terry, to urge him to have the troops then engaged in throwing up fortifications in rear of the left end of the parapet to join in a general advance, and take possession of the fort before reinforcements could be sent in to the enemy. I instructed him to state that the enemy were offering slight resistance, and that a bold push would secure a victory already substantially won. This young sailor had been previously sent to General Terry, after we had won possession of the fourth traverse, to ask him to have the naval fire in front of our advancing lines increased, if possible, and to have the fuses cut shorter, so as to cause the explosion of the shells nearer the parapet. Many passed beyond the fort, and were lost by exploding in the marsh and river. The zeal and intelligence of Mr. Kempton commanded my warmest admiration.

I then directed Captain David B. Magill, 117th New York, to take the next traverse with the first men who should come up, and went to the west end of the parapet and to the floor of the fort in rear of it, to obtain men to march up the ditch to the sea bastion. While collecting them on the floor of the fort in rear of the first and second traverses, General Ames addressed me, for the first time since the movement on the fort had begun, and said, "I have two or three times sent you word to fortify your position and hold it until reinforcements can be sent to aid us; the men are exhausted, and I will not order them to go forward." I directed his attention to two steamboats in the Cape Fear River, loaded with Confederate troops, waiting for darkness to enable them to land, which they could not do while it was light, because of the naval fire, and said, "Should they succeed in landing they may be able to drive us out; therefore, the fort should be captured before fresh troops come to the enemy." I informed him that the garrison was resisting with less spirit than earlier in the day, and asserted that complete victory was within our grasp if we aroused ourselves and pushed the advantage we surely had, and that I intended to conduct the movement up the ditch to the sea bastion if I could get but fifty men. Several said, "We will go." At this time the sun was just disappearing, at $5.15\frac{3}{10}$ P.M., —as stated by the Navy Department, two hours and five minutes from the opening of the battle.

While the volunteers were assembling I went further into the fort and had ascended a magazine or sand dune for the purpose of looking into the angle of the bastion I intended to attack, when I was struck and disabled by two fragments of a shell, one destroying the left eye, and the other carrying away a portion of the bone at the base of the brain. I was unconscious for several hours.

From official and other trustworthy sources it is shown that after sundown no special efforts were made to advance our lines, except the capture of an additional traverse by the troops

left under command of Captain Magill when I started out to collect men to go up the ditch. About 8 o'clock a regiment of colored troops from General Paine's line was sent to General Ames to assist in taking possession of the fort. He directed them to stack arms outside the fort and join the men in the rear of the left end of the parapet in throwing up breastworks to protect the assailants from a counter-charge by the garrison. Late in the afternoon the sailors and marines were withdrawn from the beach and sent to relieve Abbott's brigade, which was immediately sent down to the fort. The 3rd New Hampshire was placed on the right of Abbott's brigade, and when Captain Trickey, in command of it, was directed by General Abbott to take the traverse on that part of the parapet where the greatest resistance was expected to be made, the captain called his attention to the fact that he had less than eighty men in his command, and that a greater number might be needed to carry the traverses. General Abbott informed him he would be supported, and that his regiment was specially named to him by General Terry for that duty. The fact that the regiment was armed with repeating rifles may have influenced General Terry in making the selection. The order for the placing of the 3rd New Hampshire in Abbott's brigade, as stated to me by its commander, shows that General Terry kept in close touch with the several brigades, and gave personal attention to their movements throughout the battle. When Abbott's brigade reached the unoccupied portion of the parapet the enemy received it with a volley, but not heavy enough to check its progress. It marched over the parapet, across the floor of the fort, parallel to the sea-face, and southward to Battery Buchanan, where the garrison of Fort Fisher was found, unarmed and demoralized. These operations of Abbott's brigade were successfully carried out with the loss of four men killed and twenty-three wounded.

As soon as it was dark General Whiting and Colonel Lamb had been carried to Battery Buchanan, the former mortally and the latter seriously wounded. It was proposed to send them

across the river in small boats, as many had been, but they determined to remain and share the fate of the garrison.

The troops entered the fort without hesitation, and vied one with another, officers and men alike, for possession of the work. The loss in the early part of the engagement of Colonel Bell, commanding Third Brigade, and Colonel Smith, 112th New York, both mortally wounded before reaching the work, and of Colonel Moore, killed soon after mounting the parapet, was sorely felt throughout the day. They were soldiers of marked ability, veterans who had won distinction in every campaign in which the army to which they belonged had been engaged. Colonel Pennypacker, commanding Second Brigade, was seriously wounded while placing the colors of his regiment on the third traverse. This distinguished officer had put his brigade into position and given it an impulse which continued throughout the day. The loss of no officer could have been greater. At the end of the first hour few officers could have been found not disabled or bearing wounds that would have justified their retirement from an ordinary engagement, and a suspension of hostilities would have followed had not the troops been of the highest grade. Nine-tenths of them were veterans who had served in the campaigns in Virginia and the Carolinas, and had fought in every battle from Cold Harbor to the last battle in the campaign before Petersburg and Richmond. There was not an officer or man in the division who did not merit the highest commendation for unyielding persistency, courage, and devotion.

While the First and Second Brigades were the first to enter the fort, and contended together without distinction for possession of the parapet, it is not the intention to claim that one brigade was superior. Circumstances to a large degree, no doubt, influenced the selection as to the order in which the troops attacked the fort. The First Brigade had been near it on the first expedition, had taken its flag and a battalion of prisoners, and thoroughly believed that it could have been captured then. The knowledge of this fact undoubtedly had

much weight in influencing the commanding general to select that brigade to lead the assaulting forces. Each brigade took the position assigned to it, and performed its duties in a most courageous and efficient manner.

The crisis was passed soon after four o'clock, and success assured when the First and Second Brigades had mounted the parapet and demonstrated their ability not only to hold their ground, but to make steady progress from traverse to traverse. Had Ames and Curtis both been killed or disabled at the time Pennypacker was wounded, the battle would have proceeded successfully under the command of field and company officers. When the battle was well begun skill and generalship consisted in physical blows, and to every one who struck them honor is due.

Admiral Porter wanted success no less than General Terry, and was ready to take any steps in the line of his profession to win it. He knew, as all did, that a naval column would divert the garrison, and asked the navy to furnish men to form it. In pursuit of victory desperate chances are often taken. Never did men undertake a more difficult or hazardous task, and never did men offer themselves in their country's service with more zeal, courage or unselfish devotion than did the officers and men of the Navy, and the Marines, on the beach at Fort Fisher. Their action contributed to the progress of the army — whether the gain justified the losses we shall never know. The naval column was important as a diversion, but its value was slight in comparison with the fire of the six hundred guns trained on the fort. The fleet maintained an uninterrupted fire for two days, exceeding in effectiveness any bombardment recorded in the annals of war. To Admiral Porter's fleet the army was indebted for an uncontested landing, for an uninterrupted approach to within charging distance of the fort, and to its well directed fire in front of the assaulting forces, for a success which, without the Navy's aid, would have been impossible.

It will not be out of place to refer to the enemy and their defence of the fort.

The constant fire of the Navy for two days deprived the garrison of opportunity to rest or prepare food. While they suffered but little from this fire until brought out of their bomb-proofs to contest the advance of the assaulting forces, they then came under the hottest fire men ever encountered. Colonel Lamb skillfully conducted the defence, aided by General Whiting, who had volunteered his services on entering the fort. They protected their men until the decisive moment, and then led them with conspicuous gallantry.

The left of the parapet was in charge of a junior officer whose mistake, that of a moment only, was in failing to mount the parapet and contest our advance from the ditch. The men serving the piece of artillery covering the road, west of the parapet, were so intent in performing their duty that they were unconscious of our approach until ordered to surrender by men of the 117th New York, who went down from the parapet after capturing the second traverse.

General Bragg, in his report on the capture of the fort, says of our assaulting line:

"His army column, preceded by a single regiment, approached along the river and entered the work on that flank almost unopposed."

This does a great injustice to the men guarding the road. In fact they made it fatal to approach by the road; and not until their capture, in active defence of the work, was the road made a safer line of approach than over the parapet. The Confederate garrison of Fort Fisher might well resent this aspersion on their most stubborn defence, and justly complain of the indifference of General Bragg, who had six thousand men within striking distance of our defensive line — more than twice the number of men holding the line — in not vigorously attacking it. General Bragg reported to General Lee "That at 4 P.M., when the enemy's infantry advanced to the assault, our troops were making a heavy demonstration against the enemy's rear." Although he expended a large amount of ammunition in making

this so-called "heavy demonstration," nevertheless General Paine's line was maintained without the loss or injury of a single Union soldier.

I have said that the enemy plainly showed signs of weakening before 5 P.M., and that full possession of the fort only awaited the advance of the Federal troops. This statement is supported by the reports of Confederate officers.

In his report General Whiting says:

"The fall both of the general and the colonel commanding the fort, one about 4 and the other about 4.30 P.M., had a perceptible effect upon the men, and no doubt hastened greatly the result; but we were overpowered, and no skill or gallantry could have saved the place, after he effected a lodgment, except attack in the rear."

General Colquitt, who had been ordered, late in the afternoon, to take command of the fort, reported to General Bragg the condition of affairs he found on landing on Federal Point between 9 and 10 P.M.

"We landed, therefore, four hundred or five hundred yards from Battery Buchanan, between the Battery and Fort Fisher. I was not hailed, and did not see a sentinel or picket. A short distance from the point of landing I saw a shanty with several negroes and one or two white men in it. They reported that Fisher was taken, which, as I distrusted, I required one of them to come out and go with me as guide. I was about starting when an officer, representing himself as Captain Munn, with a dozen or fifteen men, without arms, came up. These I took for a fatigue detail, until the captain informed me the fort was evacuated; that he had just come from it, and that General Whiting and Colonel Lamb were already at Battery Buchanan. . . . Meeting an officer, he said he would carry me to Colonel Lamb, who was wounded. I found the colonel prostrate with a wound, which he thought, however, was not severe. In answer to my inquiry whether anything more could be done, he replied that a fresh brigade might then retake the fort. I told

him there was no brigade with me, and wished to know of him the condition of the men who had escaped. He said that when he was wounded everything broke up in consternation and was utterly disorganized, and that no further efforts could effect anything with the resources available."

Lieutenant Hugh H. Colquitt, who accompanied General Colquitt to Battery Buchanan, in his report says:

"I asked an officer, the coolest man I saw, at what hour the enemy got into the fort. He replied, about two hours by the sun. 'What in the world have you been doing since?' This he answered by stating that he had been fighting in the fort ever since, until dark, when the garrison commenced leaving, and he presumed all had left by that time. . . . All our men were in a state of panic and demoralization; no organization, no guns, nothing but confusion and dismay."

"The Abstract From Return of the Expeditionary Forces, Bvet. Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, U. S. Army, commanding, for January 10, 1865," gives the aggregate of the four brigades engaged in reducing the fort, five days before the assault, to have been two hundred and fifty-seven officers and five thousand one hundred and seventy-two men. Of this number probably thirty-seven hundred took part in the assault, and at 9 o'clock P.M. thirteen hundred men under Abbott and three hundred colored troops entered the fort substantially unopposed, to secure a victory actually won four hours before. There are no records in the War Department giving the number of officers and men in the brigades commanded respectively by Curtis, Pennypacker and Bell, or the number of men taken into action. It is estimated that the First (Curtis') Brigade numbered nine hundred officers and men; the Second (Pennypacker's), seventeen hundred officers and men; the Third (Bell's), eleven hundred officers and men; Abbott's Second Brigade, thirteen hundred officers and men.

The return of the casualties indicates the actual resistance met by the several brigades, which I give in the order they re-

spectively entered the fort. Curtis' brigade, two officers and thirty-seven men killed; eighteen officers and one hundred and sixty-six men wounded; five missing. 25.33 per cent. Pennypacker's brigade, six officers and forty-five men killed; six officers and two hundred and eleven men wounded; two missing. 16.47 per cent. Bell's brigade, two officers and fourteen men killed; six officers and ninety-one men wounded; two missing. 10.04 per cent. Abbott's brigade, four men killed; two officers and twenty-one men wounded; four missing. 2.33 per cent. The missing includes those injured beyond recognition, and those buried in the sand by the explosion of a magazine after the capture.

In bestowing honors for the victory at Fort Fisher we should prominently mention the Secretary of the Navy, and the officers and men of the North Atlantic blockading squadron, who, for three years, had continually urged the sending of an army force to join the navy in an expedition to reduce the defences at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Nor should we neglect prominently to associate General Grant with its capture. He organized the military force, and in spite of the first failure adhered to his purpose with unyielding persistency until the end was accomplished. The skill and labors of Admiral Porter and General Terry were fully acknowledged by the Administration and Congress, which all serving under them heartily approve.

Whatever may be the opinion of military men as to the wisdom of employing troops in throwing up breastworks inside the fort — a greater number of men than were engaged with the enemy in close action on the parapet and the floor of the fort near the parapet — instead of sending them across the floor of the fort to the sea-face, which movement would have ended the contest an hour before sunset, certain it is all will acknowledge that General Ames, under whose directions these engineering operations were carried on, bore himself with coolness and courage, as he did in his first battle, when he won a Congressional Medal of Honor for personal bravery.

The services of the gentlemen who went on both expeditions in an advisory capacity, although on the first the most important action — the withdrawal of the troops from the beach — was determined upon without his opinion being asked, were briefly stated by General Terry:

"To Bvt. Brig. Gen. C. B. Comstock, Aide-de-Camp on the staff of the Lieutenant General, I am under the deepest obligations. At every step of our progress I received from him the most valuable assistance. For the final success of our part of the operations the country is more indebted to him than to me."

It would be unjust, as it would be ungenerous, to withhold from the field and company officers the warmest praise for their watchfulness in detecting every advantage afforded by the enemy, for their irresistible impetuosity and valor, which overcame obstacles as great as human skill and stubborn devotion could create, or to fail to gratefully acknowledge the services of the men in the ranks. Their steadiness, fortitude and bravery were surpassed by no one exercising command over them. Certainly our great commander did not neglect to commend every member of the military force composing the expedition, irrespective of rank or grade, in one of the most extraordinary documents ever filed with the archives of the War Department, wherein he recommended their commander for a high position in the regular army, based solely on their services, and independent of the promotions given to Terry, Ames, Pennypacker and Curtis in acknowledgment of their personal services.

CITY POINT, VA., *January* 17, 1865.

HON. E. M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

As a substantial recognition of the bravery of both officers and men in the capture of Fort Fisher, and the important service thereby rendered to their country, I do most respectfully recommend Bvt. Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, U. S. Volunteers, their commanding officer, for appointment as Brigadier General in the Regular Army.

U. S. GRANT,
Lieutenant General.

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